

Organs Organs



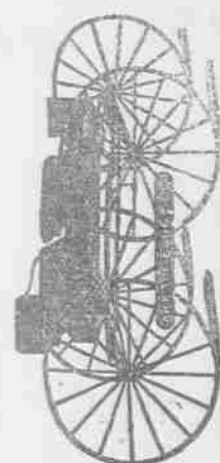
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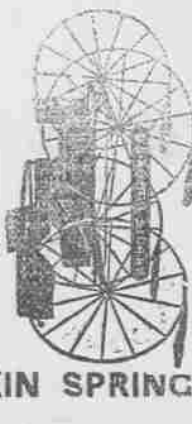
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Midsummer-day in Sweden.

While we were resting at the inn in the shade of the temporary birch grove, my companion let fall, quite carelessly and as if by chance, this sentence: "The younger members of the community while away the long twilight with dances around the richly decked May-poles." It had a suspicious sound, a Baedeker rhythm, to it. I couldn't help thinking I had heard it somewhere before; but his placid countenance betrayed no sign, and I charged my suspicions to oversensitiveness on the guide-book question, and credited the rolling sentence to a sudden flash of literary fire. But that sentence proved to be our torment, for it began to ride us the moment it was uttered. We inquired of the landlord if there was any twilight festival that night. He had heard there was to be. The boys and girls usually trimmed the May-pole, and he believed they danced around it at midnight. For his part he never sat up all night; he always turned in at 11 o'clock, summer and winter.

The possibility of a pastoral festival at the romantic hour when the golden hues of dawn meet and mingle with the sunset red was too tempting for us to resist, and instead of experimenting with sleep we strolled village ward from the inn at about eleven o'clock. The sun had disappeared behind the trees an hour or more before, but there seemed to be no diminution of his light. The glare was gone, not the illuminating power. In the west a line of red and orange clouds, recalling the splendors of a Venetian sunset, changed slowly in form, but never lost its brilliancy of coloring. A strong diffused light, casting no shadow, came from the whole dome of the heavens, giving an unnatural color to the grass and to the masses of foliage. The strangeness of the effect seemed almost portentous, as if some great convulsion of nature were about to take place. It was like that glow of late sunset which in other climates is always rare and always evanescent. No dew had fallen, but across the meadows rose a thin mist, floating lightly on the breath of the evening, drifting into fantastic, ghost-like shapes.

Across the valley the distant hillsides were harmonized by the softness of the light into broad masses against the sky, but still all details were visible as the delicate haze of an afternoon in Indian summer. There were no signs of night in the village. Doors and windows were open, and children were playing around the prostrate May-pole. Perched on the fences sat rows of men and boys quietly chatting. We sat on the fence also, and, in order to feel more at home, began to whittle little sticks like some of the men, and tried to look as careless and contented as they did. We sat there a half hour or more, then changed to a fence of another shape and sat another half-hour, and still nothing particular took place. Then we began to think it was only a kind of open-air watch party to welcome the midsummer sun on St. John's-day. But while we were meditating a return to the hotel there was a stir in the street, and a party of stout girls appeared upon the scene, bearing great bundles of birch boughs, grass and field flowers. Throwing these in a fragrant heap upon the steps of a house, they all set to work in a busy crowd, and in a short time had woven wreaths and garlands and were decorating the striped pole. No loud words were spoken, scarcely a laugh broke the stillness of the night. It was a solemn, almost religious ceremony. From the red of the sunset sky a delicate rosy reflection touched the white sleeves and kerchiefs, and harmonized the harsh colors of the caps and aprons. Even the crudely painted architecture was modulated into unobtrusive quality of tone by the soft light. One by one the busy workers ceased their labors as the ugly pole grew into graceful shape, and spread long arms with trailing wreaths and tufts of flowers. The men watched on in silence, the tired children stopped their whistles and sat in ranks on the curbstone. Now the cool draught of night only stirred the leaves at intervals, the mist settled low upon the meadows, and the weird forms melted away. A new light from some mysterious quarter gradually spread itself over the landscape, and even while scarcely visible changed the general tone. The rosy reflection from the west lost its delicate quality, faded into a cooler light, then changed to the faintest tinge of gold. It was the charm of sunset changing to the beauty of sunrise. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, came the transformation. The glory of the east rivaled awhile the splendor of the west, until the first rays of the sun shot across the sky, and it was day again. At that moment the pole was put in its place by the strong arms of a score of men, and fastened to the post where it stands the season long, shedding its dried leaves and grasses with every wind that blows. As if by magic the crowd disappeared, and we were left alone.—F. D. MILLET, in *Harper's Magazine*.

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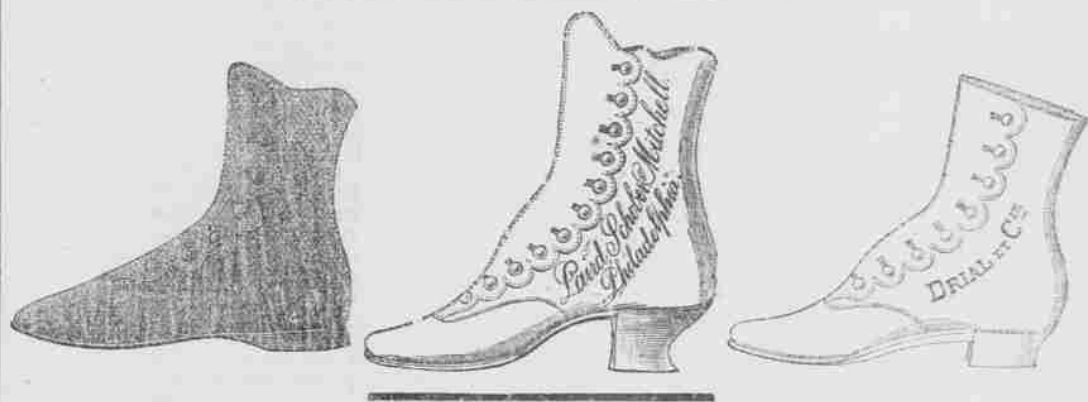
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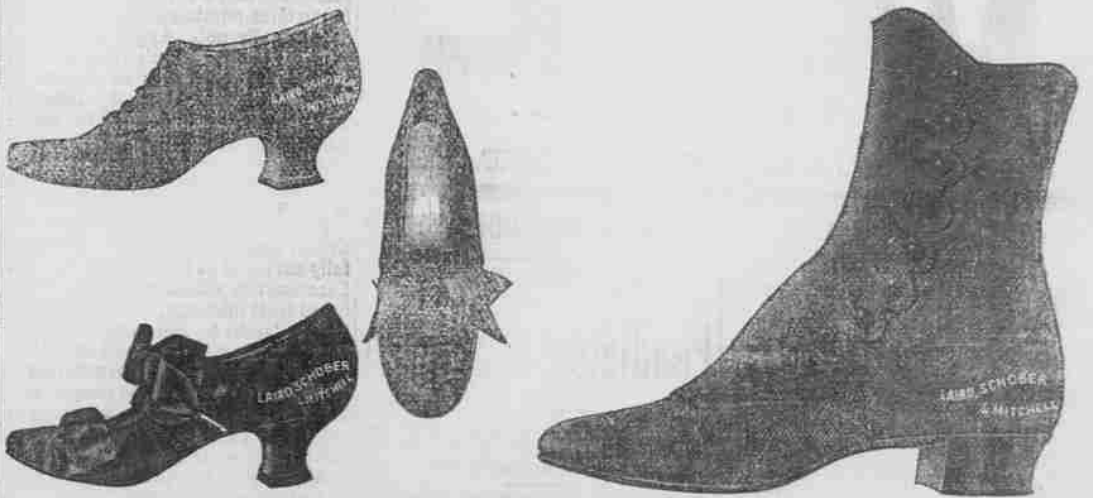
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